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**REMARKS BELOW

KENNEDY DISCUSSES VITAL IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTING SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

CONDEMNS POLITICS OF IDEOLOGY BLOCKADING DISCOVERY

BOSTON, MA- Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, today addressed students, professors and community members at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Compton Lecture in the Stata Center's Kirsch Auditorium. Senator Kennedy discussed the current politics of ideology that blockade important scientific discoveries in stem cell research and climate change, as well as new and improved approaches to fighting terrorism and expanding economic opportunity. Kennedy condemned the Bush Administration's political calculations to determine the nation's best course of action. Kennedy also discussed the progress being made by the new Congress, and emphasized the importance of investment in education and the importance of giving students the tools they need to thrive in a global economy.

"Tragically – and dangerously -- the Administration has developed a pattern and practice of ignoring or manipulating facts to achieve a desired political result. But, no matter how hard they try to create their own pseudo-science and pseudo-reality, in the long run, they will not succeed. The reality-based community is alive and well. And we're fighting back."

This week, the United States Senate voted overwhelmingly to reverse President Bush's prohibitions on stem cell research. If the President signs this legislation, it would open the doors to life-saving discoveries in cancer, heart disease, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. President Bush vetoed the legislation last year, and it never became law. Prior to Wednesday's vote, Senator Kennedy and a bipartisan group of Senators, joined the Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research (CAMR) in urging the Senate to pass this important measure.

The Karl Taylor Compton Lecture Series was established in 1957 to honor the late Karl Taylor Compton, who served as president of MIT from 1930-48 and chairman of the Corporation from 1948-54. The purpose of the lectureship is to give the MIT community direct contact with the important ideas of our times and with people who have contributed much to modern thought.

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Remarks of Senator Edward M. Kennedy
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
April 13, 2007

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Let me begin with the one premise I'm sure we can all agree on: that MIT reflects the best traditions of our country.

That's been true from its beginning. In 1859, Governor Nathaniel Banks proposed that the state donate lands for education. A citizens' committee, led by William Barton Rogers, proposed an institute of technology because, they said, "material prosperity and intellectual advancement are . . . inseparably associated."

They also believed in what they called "the happy influence of scientific culture on the industry and civilization of nations." The founders of this great university understood that the spirit of scientific inquiry could serve a model for a more enlightened age. And the result of their vision has been a remarkable century and a half of leadership by MIT in producing scientists, engineers, and entrepreneurs who have changed the world.

The political leaders who founded this university embraced progress. They valued independent academic inquiry. They believed that politics should be influenced and informed by science – not the other way around. They knew that a strong society must be an educated society. They understood that the never-ending effort to form a more perfect union would always require a restless spirit that asks new questions and is not afraid of the answers.

Ah, for those good old days.

Today, it often seems that we live in less enlightened times than those that gave birth to MIT.

We see governmental officials who reject independent academic inquiry. We find people in power who believe that political advantage – and not scientific truth – should inform public policy. We see leaders who undermine the human quest for

knowledge by insisting that we stop asking questions and, blindly follow the leader instead.

With this warped philosophy of government, truth is taking a beating. In fact, one aide to President Bush scoffed at those of us who are still part of what he called "the reality-based community," because we foolishly "believe that solutions emerge from [the] judicious study of discernible reality." "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he explained. Instead – and I'm still quoting here -- "[w]hen we act, we create our own reality . . ."

That kind of skewed thinking has spread like a cancer in our current Administration, infecting every policy decision they make. Tragically – and dangerously -- the Administration has developed a pattern and practice of ignoring or manipulating facts to achieve a desired political result. But, no matter how hard they try to create their own pseudo-science and pseudo-reality, in the long run, they will not succeed. The reality-based community is alive and well. And we're fighting back.

Just two days ago, I was proud to cast my vote in the United States Senate – again -- in support of embryonic stem cell research and the hope it brings to millions of Americans.

Yet this important research has been crippled for nearly six years by an Administration with a policy that is flawed and, frankly, nonsensical. I want to say at the outset that I understand and deeply respect the religious and moral opposition that some have to stem cell research. But, in my view, that's not what we're talking about here. When you look closely, the administration's stem cell policy pays lip service to those concerns, but it does not truly reflect them.

The administration would have us believe that their policy stems from a moral concern with the use of embryonic stem cells. But their actual policy allows federal funding for stem cell lines that were created before August 9, 2001. Moreover, the Administration does not seek to outlaw stem cell research. It doesn't seek to close down fertility clinics. It doesn't seek to stop the fertilization and disposal of eggs in a laboratory. It just opposes the federal funding of stem cell lines created since August 9, 2001. And what's the scientific or moral significance of that date? Nothing. It's simply the date the President first addressed the nation on the subject of stem cell research.

Without question, the United States is being put at a serious competitive disadvantage by failing to expand federal-funded research in this area. Our medical research capabilities have been the envy of the world, but we will be left out and left behind if we don't aggressively continue to explore this new frontier. As Prime Minister Tony Blair said last year, "if America does not want stem cell research, we do." And so do countless other countries who see the promise of

this research and understand -- as the founders of MIT did -- that intellectual advancement and material prosperity are inseparable.

A strong majority in Congress favors federal support for stem cell research, but, as of today, we do not have the votes to override a Presidential veto.

So we look to you and applaud the commitment you've made through Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research. And we look to the Commonwealth and applaud the commitment that Governor Patrick has expressed. And we look to other states and institutions that have made that commitment. But we all understand that, to be truly competitive, we need the leadership and financial resources of the federal government. And we need federal leaders who do not allow political posturing to restrict scientific progress.

In addition to preventing new breakthroughs in medical research, this administration has also blocked patients from accessing existing treatments. The most stark example of this intrusion is found in the FDA's consideration of over-the-counter sales of the emergency contraceptive pill Plan B. In 2003, the FDA's professional staff recommended approval of over the counter sales of this drug. The relevant FDA scientific advisory committee also voted overwhelmingly that Plan B was safe and effective for women of all ages. But the White House allowed a narrow minority in its right-wing base to drown out this scientific consensus, and it was not until August 2006 that the FDA finally approved over the counter sales of Plan B.

We should not have been surprised by this attack on the use of science to help family planning. Two days after he was inaugurated, President Bush signed an executive order banning federal funds from going to international family planning groups that offer information about abortion. This action has been followed by years of derailing and defunding efforts to improve international family planning, despite its enormous potential to improve the health and lives of those in the developing world.

The threat to scientific progress is not limited to medical research and treatment. Look, for example, at global warming. There is a strong consensus that global warming is being accelerated by the burning of fossil fuels. But, with the backing of its cronies in the oil and gas industry, the Administration decided to create its own reality on global warming. We now know from whistleblowers and investigations that scientific conclusions that did not match the Administration's political agenda have either been rewritten or ignored.

As James Hansen, Director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York and an early voice on climate change, recently told Congress,

“In my more than three decades in government, I have never seen anything approaching the degree to which information flow from scientists to the public has been screened and controlled as it has now.”

That process involved allowing former oil industry lobbyists employed by the White House to edit EPA documents about global warming before they were released. A House Committee found earlier this year that those edits weakened critical conclusions about the scope and causes of climate change. They even deleted the statement that such changes “are likely mostly the result of human activities.” The Office of Management and Budget then insisted that these scientific documents -- “need balance,” because “global climate change has beneficial effects as well as adverse impacts.”

But, proving yet again the old adage that you can’t fool all of the people all of the time, the Supreme Court, just last week, rejected the Administration’s arguments for failing to regulate CO₂ emissions, citing incontrovertible scientific evidence that greenhouse gases are contributing to global climate change. This is by no means the end of the story, but it is an enormous victory.

There are countless additional examples of the politicization of science. In just this morning’s New York Times, Paul Krugman reports that “a Presidential appointee at NASA . . . told a web site designer to add the word “theory” after every mention of the Big Bang, to leave open the possibility of ‘intelligent design by a creator.’” The President himself has supported the teaching of intelligent design in our public schools, notwithstanding the enormous weight of scientific evidence against it.

Unfortunately, we are fighting the war for truth on many other fronts -- not just those public policy debates directly affected by science.

The war in Iraq is perhaps the most prominent example. In September 2002, 33 international security scholars, among them 4 MIT professors, representing some of the best minds in the world, signed a letter in the New York Times, explaining why war with Iraq would prove disastrous. I agreed with them, and am proud to have spoken out and voted against the war from the beginning. As I’ve often said, it’s the best vote I’ve cast in my 44 years in the United States Senate.

But, as we now know, even before the vote in Congress, President Bush had decided to go to war with Iraq, and Administration officials were busily collecting and twisting information to support that decision. According to a confidential memo written by a member of the British Government in July 2002, fully eight months before we invaded Iraq:

Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action . . . the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.

Just as with stem cell research and global warming, the decision to go to war was made first and the facts were retooled to support it. Those in the intelligence community or armed forces who refused to go along were ignored or fired. And too few in Congress asked questions, or tested the administration's assertions against available intelligence or the actual testimony of the Generals who appeared before Congress.

Perhaps most egregiously, the Administration's political operation encouraged candidates to use the war as a political tool, attacking the patriotism of those who opposed the war or the Administration's rosy view of the situation on the ground.

This manipulation of our intelligence and political institutions has resulted in tragedy of unspeakable proportions. "Mission Accomplished" has become "Mission Impossible." And yet the administration and its supporters continue to ignore the reality of a bloody civil war being fought before their very eyes. Fortunately, the American people and a bipartisan majority of both houses of Congress are facing reality and insisting that we begin to withdraw from Iraq.

Over and over and over again, in the past six years, we have seen the triumph of politics over the public policy. We've seen it at the Department of Justice, which has gone from being a bulwark of independence to being a political tool. We've seen it when a mining industry executive was placed in charge of worker safety at the Mine Safety and Health Administration. We've seen it when the lobbyist for the companies who manufacture consumer products is named to head the Consumer Product Safety Commission. And the list goes on.

This manipulation of governmental institutions for political gain not only breeds cynicism and erodes trust, but it also threatens the very foundations of our democracy.

But there is an antidote for this poison, and you've got it here at MIT. You understand that the answer to unquestioning uncertainty is not absolute certainty of our own, but a questioning spirit that seeks to find and follow the truth.

The opportunity for investigation and innovation is what attracts so many students and researchers to MIT each year. It's the idea that a major breakthrough, a revolutionary discovery, or a new vision of society is just around the next corner. It's the idea that your intellect can be harnessed to make life better for others.

That same kind of spirit is what attracts people to politics and public service. It's the belief in the power of an individual to make a difference. It's the willingness to persevere and to work through complex issues. It is the ability to understand and build on all that we have inherited from those who came before us.

As both politicians and scientists know, difficult issues are not solved in weeks or months or even years. They are often the work of a lifetime. That is why I so deeply regret the lost opportunities of the last six years.

But I also have great hope for the years just ahead. In Washington, we have begun to insist again on policies that are rooted in reality rather than ideology. And I know that MIT will be our partner in making science and public policy partners once again.

Together, we will return to the great traditions that were at the heart of the founding of MIT a century and a half ago. At that very time, Alfred Lord Tennyson was giving voice to the spirit that we must reclaim today: "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." Thank you very much.

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